LEVEL news

Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

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PDF Format

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Water Levels for the Great Lakes and Montreal Harbour *a monthly bulletin from Canadian Hydrographic Service*

About the monthly Water Level bulletin

May Precipitation Over the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term May average:

Great Lakes Basin 194%

Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair) 195%

Lake Superior 142%

Lakes Michigan-Huron 227%

Wet May Results in Larger than Average Water Level Increases

May was a very wet month in the Great Lakes region. Preliminary data indicates that new record high rainfall amounts for the month fell on the Lakes Michigan-Huron basin and on the Great Lakes basin as a whole.

Water levels on each of the Great Lakes and Lake St. Clair rose by more than average during May as a result of the rain and related runoff. Daily water levels on the middle lakes-lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie-increased 14 to 17 cm more than average during May. In all, levels on lakes Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie rose 23, 23 and 20 cm, respectively, from the beginning to the end of the month. Daily water levels on Lake Ontario rose 18 cm during May, more than twice its period-of-record average increase for the month. Daily water levels on Lake Superior increased 12 cm, just 2 cm more than average.

As indicated in the Water Level Information table provided below, water levels on all lakes and on the middle lakes in particular, are currently higher than they were at the same time last year. Lakes Michigan-Huron remain about 28 cm below average; however, there has been a notable improvement in water levels relative to average conditions on these lakes over the past six months. At the beginning of November 2003, levels on Lakes Michigan-Huron were 60 cm below average.

While the recent rainfall is receiving some well deserved attention, three things-the wet, mild weather experienced during November and December 2003, an early spring snow melt, and the wet May weather-have all combined in varying degrees to help improve water level conditions throughout the basin over the past six months.

Great Lakes Water Level Information

	May Monthly Mean Level		Beginning of June Level	
Lake	Compared to Monthly Average (1918-2002)	Compared to One Year Ago	Compared to Beginning-of-Month Average (1918-2002)	Compared to One Year Ago
Superior	15 cm below	5 cm above	11 cm below	8 cm above

Lake Ontario 163%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

May Outflows From the Great Lakes

As a percentage of the long-term May average:

Lake Superior 95%

Lake Erie 96%

Lake Huron 93%

Lake Ontario 98%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

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Summary information for "LEVEL*news*"

Michigan-Huron	40 cm below	20 cm above	28 cm below	30 cm above
St. Clair	13 cm below	18 cm above	4 cm below	18 cm above
Erie	7 cm below	14 cm above	1 cm above	17 cm above
Ontario	3 cm above	9 cm above	9 cm above	6 cm above

Are we seeing an end to the current low water period?

As levels rise in response to recent rainfall and runoff, it's a popular question these days. Unfortunately, it's impossible to answer it at this point in time. As LEVELnews readers may recall, we saw a similar recovery in levels on the middle lakes during the fall of 2001 and the winter and spring of 2002. After moving closer to their long-term average levels by the summer of 2002, levels on the middle lakes fell to the same levels as they were at the beginning of February 2001 by February 2003. Although specific details differed by lake, simply put, the greater than average seasonal declines experienced during the fall and winter of 2002-2003 erased the recovery in levels experienced between summer 2001 and summer 2002. We do not mean to suggest that we expect the same thing is going to happen again this year. We simply wish to illustrate that there is always a great deal of uncertainty about future levels. We will have to wait and see if the improvements in water levels experienced over the past six months on lakes Superior, Michigan-Huron, St. Clair and Erie will be sustained in the long run.

Short-term Forecast

The latest edition of the Monthly Water Level Bulletin (May 2004) found at: http://chswww.bur.dfo.ca/danp/ contains the water level forecast for June to November 2004. Since actual water levels will likely fall somewhere within the probable ranges provided it is reasonable to expect that water level on all lakes, except Lake Ontario, will be higher this summer than they were last year. Water levels conditions on Lake Ontario will likely be similar to those experienced last year.

Please Remember to be Cautious

Although water levels may be higher this summer than they were last year, any rocks visible last year will not be that far below the surface.

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